



AN INTERVIEW

JEAN-LUC GODARD...FOR HIMSELF:

Don Ranvaud: In discussing *Sauve Qui Peut (La Vie)* (Slow Motion) you have talked about the problem of the film maker not being able to work constantly, needing to be involved in practice, in 'training'. Do teaching and writing not also constitute a film maker's practice?

Jean-Luc Godard: Most movie-makers, in my opinion, want to be in the movie business but they don't want to make movies. There's a difference between making movies and being in the movie business, which people want to be in because of the magic. Who doesn't want to be a magician? But even magicians and sorcerers have to *train*. You don't see it but they do train. A painter is drawing every day, rock singers are playing all day long; otherwise their work would be impossible. Everybody is in training, except movie-makers. When Eisenstein wasn't making movies he was teaching, and today we discover that for him teaching was making movies. He studied El Greco and when he speaks of him, it's not of El Greco the painter but El Greco the movie-maker. He doesn't say he's painting, he says he's editing. In France most people in the movie business are unemployed, so what work should they do – they decide that when you are not shooting you are unemployed, but there are a lot of things other than shooting to a movie. You can go to movies, talk about them, write essays, take stills....you can use a cheap video recorder and make a movie for one person, about them, and then show it to them. They can be your first audience.

D.R.: What about television. Do you think its the same magic?

J.L.G.: There could be a good brother and sister relationship between film and TV. There's a lot of time for the training part of things on TV, or there ought to be, because you're not limited to two hours and you can explore things. You have a relationship with an audience of a million for an hour but you don't even know if they're not eating or making love while it's on the screen....

D.R.: Could you tell us about the projects you're involved with at the moment. There's the setting up of a school in Rotterdam and something in California....

J.L.G.: I'm working on a research programme on the history of the movie with the Film International in Rotterdam, as well as a screenplay co-produced by Coppola and myself. Instead of writing a script we are going to shoot it. So when we look for a star for it, maybe, and they say "May I read the script," we say "No but you can see it." It's called "The Story" and it deals with the question "Why do we need a story? Or are we a story ourselves, and if so why do we need ourselves?" Instead of working with just a piece of paper and a pencil it's working with a camera, with video equipment and any other equipment you think you need. Like scientists, who don't write the experiment before doing it. The experience is a commentary on itself.

Peter Wollen: Is that how you worked on *Slow Motion*?

J.L.G.: Not exactly. But it came after a lot of work, like making TV serials and being in control of our own equipment, which is in the same area. You construct a story and a way of working from the reality as you look at it. But you have to look at it. Most movies today are made by blind people.

D.R.: About *Slow Motion* you've said that it's your "second first



film". You seem to treat your previous work as in some way a "training" towards this, although there was so much in the previous work that would run counter to the ethics of narratives and plots... To what extent can we deconstruct the Godard we have come to know at various stages, right up to this film, through this film? There is a strong narrative line in this film and to put it simply it's reasonably commercial.

J.L.G.: I hope so. There is no real difference for me between art and money. It's as hard to raise the money for a film as it is to make a good one. With this film I'm returning to a part of the business I haven't been in for a long time, and that involves selling and you find ideas through selling. Discussing it with you is selling. The film's a step forward. Sometimes you go back and cross your own steps before you can go on again. I'm more aware of myself and my own capabilities and I'm able to make my own movie – for a long time I made movies for other directors. In fact I was admired for that, for making films for other directors or would-be directors, who were my real audience, but now I'm capable of making my own movie because I've worked in an opposite way: instead of working from myself towards the other director I've started from the other and worked towards myself.

P.W.: When you're thinking about a film, how do you relate the three areas: your ideas for a film, money and the budget, and the audience?

J.L.G.: I have a very good Xerox machine and sometimes, instead of writing letters, I use an image which gives me an idea. I put some words on it "Why don't we make something on that?", and send it to someone. It's more like painting and sculpture. And when you receive the money you start to think "What the hell can I do," like having paintings commissioned.

P.W.: But the people who have the money are able to decide which films match which audience.

J.L.G.: There are no problems, only solutions, you don't suddenly say "I want to make *The Brothers Karamazov* and that means I need \$50 million, because you have to write it. If you write a *Brothers Karamazov* that works that way, the money will come one way or the other.

P.W.: You make the money sound very passive....

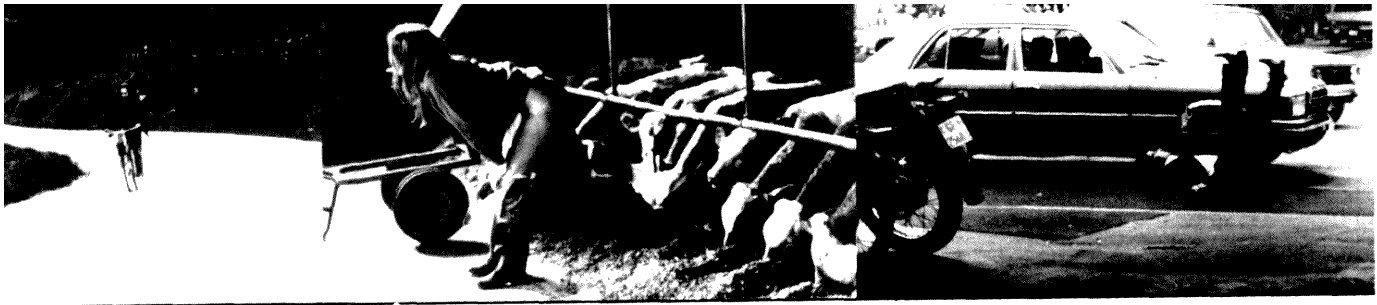
J.L.G.: On the contrary it's very active. You can't avoid it between all images. There isn't one day or one second when we're not involved in a question of money. That's why movies are so popular, because money is a part of their everyday life. You have to see your lover but you have no money to take the bus: the movie is like that, physically, economically, technically tied up with money.

D.R.: Can we talk about the conditions of your living and working in Switzerland, and the choice it represents for you.

J.L.G.: The choice was to leave a big city and move to a small one – I was raised in small city, 90% of films are made in big cities by white boys, which is a little too much. In cities you don't see the sky, the earth, animals, your neighbour, nothing. If you don't see a tree how can you imagine it?

D.R.: What kind of films do you like to see most and what do you see in Switzerland? Have you seen the films of the Latin American and African film makers in France?

J.L.G.: I like very big films but there aren't so many to see now. I haven't seen many of these films. Where I'm living now there are



n't many movies released, so I see what I can.

P.W.: **Do you read newspapers?**

J.L.G.: Only sometimes. I read newspapers when I get on a train, from the place I have left.

D.R.: **Do you feel a certain responsibility towards political and aesthetic statements made in the past?... Making films like *British Sounds* you were working in a group. Is that significant to your feeling of rejection now?**

J.L.G.: The work I did then was honest and good and sincere, but completely exaggerated. It wasn't my real voice; it was too experimental, but we had no way of avoiding that. In fact the critics were right – there were some good things, but it was too general. Perhaps they were in the wrong place; some of those movies should have been produced in university classrooms, but not as ordinary features. They were small films for a small audience that was too far away from these small experiments.

P.W.: **What's wrong with a small audience?**

J.L.G.: Loneliness can be good but isolation is not so good. I was rejected and isolated. But my feeling about it isn't only of rejection. I was very glad and am still very glad that the end of it was a big physical accident for me which allowed me to relax for two or three years, to work and recover. It was like a war, like the Vietnam war for me going under a truck in the Paris traffic. When you get older you discover there is still a lot to be seen, because you've been so far away, or pushed away, and then you discover your own home. The title of *Sauve Qui Peut...* could have been "Coming Home". A real coming home – the other one, the Hal Ashby one with Jane Fonda wasn't....

P.W.: **Well, Vietnam isn't exactly the same.**

J.L.G.: For me it is....

D.R.: **At one point in the new film a character says: "I am not strong enough to do anything other than make films", which is from Marguerite Duras. Do you feel very close to that line?**

J.L.G.: Yes, I could have said it.

D.R.: **Marguerite Duras isn't a film maker who seems concerned, still, with the size of her audiences. Do you think that kind of film making is impossible now? That there has to be an audience so the films reflect that?**

J.L.G.: It depends what kind of audience you mean. Duras is openly and obviously saying "I need another audience. I don't go with those people to that kind of party", but if I was paid an average salary not to teach movies, but to make movies in a classroom which is taught by a regular teacher.... that's why I'm trying to find co-producers and sponsors. So as not to be obliged to make movies for TV and theatres, but be able to make them in other places, not just once but regularly; not just "do me a documentary about this" because of your name.... Also in that way you can build a feature because you're like a gardener who has to take care of a lot of flowers, but you're more interested in one particular kind of flower because you think it's more beautiful, and so you develop it. Now this is a feature....

D.R.: **How did you feel about Helmuth Costard's film on you, *Das Kleine Godard*, and about the business of using your reputation and your place in film history for a project not to be**

realized in the usual way...?

J.L.G.: I like it, I like the way he did it and it was very funny. At that time I was working on another project and it happened that our paths crossed. Otherwise I wouldn't have done it. But it was real...

D.R.: **What's your relationship to writing now? After your special issue of *Cahiers du Cinema* in particular.**

J.L.G.: There's an idea I tried to bring across in that special issue, and it's also in Marguerite Duras' issue: it used the elements of the magazine, words, printing, but it was also movie-making. I liked doing that, but it's difficult and usually one is just writing an article or doing an interview...

D.R.: **Can you say something about your presence at Cannes this year and the actual making and selling of the film? How long did it take to make, between pre-production and editing and shooting..?**

J.L.G.: I was at Cannes for promotional reasons and to find out what people thought. It took a year to make. I don't want to be rude, but the idea has no meaning for me that the shooting is done and then the editing. I hate the crew when they believe that they are doing the preparations to wait for the shooting, as a kind of lost paradise. To me the shooting of a picture is the continuation of the preparation. After the shooting, you can't keep the crew even if you pay them, because there's no more shooting to do, so they don't know what to do, editing and shooting are really spread over the actual filming and cutting. There is screenwriting but it's not necessarily before the shooting. Finding locations, building ideas, talking to people is editing, during the supposed screenwriting time. The best technical thing about the film is that it has only two sound tracks. Most films have between 5 and 7, and Martin Scorsese has 49. Technique is very philosophical.... And then we lost the audience....

D.R.: **Music and the role of music in film seems to be very important to *Slow Motion*... which relates closely to the video work you've done.**

J.L.G.: In music today, in American Music and Rock and Roll there is much more narrative than in pictures and books. I think video helped, because in working with video you get used to two tracks together. You do the dialogue and you splice and then think "maybe I can add some music or some sound effect there".

D.R.: **You've made a deal with Coppola over this film, both as a collaborator on the next project and distributor for *Slow Motion*...**

J.L.G.: Yes. I got a quarter of a million dollars, which is a lot for an art movie for the States, and more than I've ever got for a film, so with that money we can co-produce something else. What he wants in a sense is a small partner. He's a good producer. We'll be talking and seeing each other and I think he'll be shooting in some places I will. It's a discussion between two partners who respect each other. I'm being produced by another movie maker and helping him in a sense because he can say "I'm helping a good European movie maker".

D.R.: **Would you like to work in the States after that?**

J.L.G.: To work in the States but not to stay in the States. This picture "The Story" deals with the origin of the story, so the origin of the image, the origin of the motion picture industry and Hollywood, so it has to be done not just in the States, but in California.